

STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

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DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS

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To the Editor
New York Times
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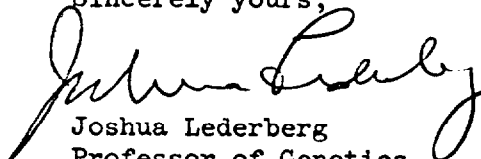
Dear Sir:

"Shoot first--ask questions later" may be part of the folk art of Western America, but it has little place as a prescription for government. The political popularity of Governor Reagan suggests that his policies in California have a potential national significance that warrant giving them more public exposure than they have so far received outside that state.

I refer especially now to the budget cuts of \$17,000,000 in California's mental hygiene program that have been invoked in the name of economy. Governor Reagan certainly did not conceal his conservative outlook on the financial responsibilities of State government during his very successful election campaign, and he could argue that he has had the most powerful electoral mandate to economize in government. However, the most pessimistic of his opponents might be surprised at the precipitous way in which these economies are being implemented. There has been ample testimony that the staff reductions now proposed will result in tangible inhumanities to a whole range of patients in State institutions, from mentally retarded children to alcoholics and senile psychotics. Particularly puzzling is the priority given to lopping the outpatient care facilities started in several communities, which have already saved hundreds of patients from being committed to institutions.

Governor Reagan has justified the cuts on the grounds that new drugs might reduce the patient load in the institutions. There has not, however, been any comprehensive study of the way in which new techniques could be used to make possible, for the first time, a program of mental health that meets minimum standards of human concern within an achievable budget. The Governor has promised to relent, after the fact, if a deterioration of standards is provable. This is exactly the "shoot first" policy, which is unworthy of the governor of a great state. It will be a sad reflection indeed if it proves to be a qualification for high office of an aspirant for the presidency of the United States.

Sincerely yours,



Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics
Director, Kennedy Laboratories